United Nations S/2009/278

Security Council

Distr.: General
1 June 2009

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Myanmar

Summary

The present report, which has been prepared pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), covers the period from 1 October 2007 to 31 March 2009 and is the second report on children and armed conflict in Myanmar to be presented to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

The report provides information on the grave violations against children in Myanmar and identifies State and non-State parties to the conflict responsible for such violations. It highlights the fact that United Nations agencies and its partners in Myanmar remain constrained by the absence of an agreed action plan and access and security impediments which present a challenge for effective monitoring and reporting efforts, and for the provision of a comprehensive account of grave violations being perpetrated by a range of armed forces and groups in Myanmar.

The report notes various levels of contact and some progress in establishing child protection dialogue between the United Nations Resident Coordinator, the United Nations country team, the country task force and the Government, as well as some ceasefire groups. It also recognizes several important ongoing initiatives by the Government of Myanmar to address the issue of underage recruitment into military service since my first report and pursuant to Security Council Working Group conclusions, including actions to discharge underage children, and training and awareness-raising activities for military personnel on international and national law on the prevention of recruitment of children.

The report stresses the need for the Governments concerned to facilitate dialogue between the United Nations and the Karen National Union and Karenni National Progressive Party for the purposes of signing an action plan in accordance with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005), following their initial deeds of commitment.

Finally, the report contains a series of recommendations aimed at securing strengthened action for the protection of children in Myanmar.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report, covering the period from October 2007 to March 2009, has been prepared in accordance with Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), and specifies grave violations against children affected by armed conflict in Myanmar. The present report is a follow-up to my first report (S/2007/666), and provides an update on the implementation of the conclusions of the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.51/2008/8) issued on 25 July 2008, pursuant to my first report.

2. There have been several positive initiatives undertaken and measures purportedly implemented by the Government of Myanmar to prevent and halt the recruitment and use of children. However, the country task force on monitoring and reporting has been unable to verify many of the outcomes of those initiatives. United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organization staff in Myanmar remained constrained by the absence of an agreed action plan; the lack of adequate access to contested and ceasefire areas; the lack of security guarantees for victims and witnesses reporting on grave rights violations; and restricted freedom of movement of United Nations and international non-governmental organization (INGO) staff (other than International Labour Organization (ILO) staff), that is, without government escorts. The severe restriction of access by the Government to locations of concern continues to limit the ability of the country task force and its partners to monitor and report on grave violations being perpetrated against children by all parties to the conflict, despite the fact that the basic structures of the monitoring and reporting mechanism have been in place since February 2007. While the Government has facilitated an initial meeting between members of the country task force and the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army (KNU/KNLA) Peace Council and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, and with further meetings to progress action plan discussions being planned, the Government has been reticent to allow for further dialogue between the United Nations and the KNU/KNLA and the Karenni National Progressive Party/Karenni Army (KNPP/KA) for the purposes of signing an action plan following their initial deeds of commitment, thereby impeding progress on securing the release and rehabilitation of children associated with those groups.

II. Political, military and social developments in Myanmar

3. The country is undertaking some structural political changes and as such, there are certain levels of uncertainty in respect to the transition period. The position of certain ceasefire groups remains unclear. Sudden changes in the configuration could affect progress on the release of children and progress on monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children by the armed forces and armed groups in Myanmar.

4. In May 2008, cyclone Nargis caused widespread destruction and loss of life in Myanmar, leaving an estimated 140,000 dead or missing. The Ayeyarwaddy Delta and Yangon Division were badly damaged, with some 2.4 million people severely affected, including by the loss of shelter, livelihood, and access to food and water. A total of 4,000 schools and more than 600 health facilities were destroyed or damaged, and hundreds of children were orphaned or separated from their parents and relatives.

III. Grave violations of children's rights

5. The access and security impediments described above present a challenge to the provision of a comprehensive account of grave violations against children by a range of armed forces and groups in Myanmar. The present report is based on the limited information currently available to the country task force, and therefore is only indicative of the gravity and scale of violations against children.

6. The data on incidents of grave violations against children included in this report have been compiled from confirmed information from and observations of United Nations agencies and child-protection partners. Where possible, the members of the country task force conducted first-hand interviews on a confidential basis, in order to verify the initial information received. Verification activity on allegations of child soldiering is currently restricted to the follow-up of formal complaints received under the Supplementary Understanding complaints mechanism signed between ILO and the Government.

7. I welcome the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the Union of Myanmar to the United Nations, Kyaw Tint Swe, at the Security Council open debate on 29 April 2009 and look forward to the country task force working more closely with the Government Task Force.

A. Recruitment of children by armed forces and groups

Tatmadaw Kyi

8. The country task force has received numerous credible reports concerning the recruitment and use of children by some Government military units of the Tatmadaw Kyi.

9. Apart from the common patterns of underage recruitment into the Tatmadaw highlighted in my last report, including the recruitment of poor and unaccompanied children from the streets, railway stations or Buddhist pagodas, reports indicate that elements of the Tatmadaw Kyi have recently targeted young novice monks from monasteries for recruitment. An indicative case, as yet unverified, but received from reliable sources, occurred on 22 August 2008, when a lance corporal from a local battalion of the army recruited two boys, aged 13 and 15, respectively, from a monastery in a Nargis-affected township in the Ayeyarwaddy Division. The boys were later released, following intervention from the abbot.

10. It appears that, when soldiers are involved in underage recruitment, this commonly (although not exclusively) occurs in areas close to recruitment centres, such as in the Yangon and Mandalay Divisions, but civilian brokers who are offered cash by soldiers for new recruits travel further afield to find recruits and often use deceit to persuade the children to go with them. In another indicative case, a 15-year-old boy who fled from a battalion in the Mandalay Division to a nearby village reported that, under the pretext of gaining good employment, a broker had persuaded him to go with him; however the broker had then handed him over to army personnel from a recruitment centre.

11. Reports also indicate that orphans are often targeted for recruitment into the military. Another case, unverified but received from credible sources, reported that, on 14 August 2008, a group of soldiers from a battalion based in Myothit abducted a

14-year-old orphan boy from a village in Kachin State. When the boy's brother and representatives of the village appealed for his release at the Makhoy battalion command post, they were denied access to the military authorities and the child.

12. According to ILO, in most cases, underage recruits go through the full formal recruitment process and are required to undertake approximately four and one-half months of training before being sent to their duty station. In a few cases, children have been recruited directly into an operational unit. There is no information available to confirm whether or not this latter case is, in fact, the norm. However, post-discharge interviews have established that, during senior officers' visits to recruiting centres, training camps and operational units, children in the ranks are instructed to hide until the officers complete their inspection and leave. This could suggest that, in some areas, the initiative to recruit young children into the army is that of lower rank and/or field level officers. Indeed, some rank-and-file soldiers have talked of their confusion about receiving instructions to find new recruits, but at the same time being told not to recruit children.

13. The following cases were recorded by ILO:

- A boy was 11 years old when an army sergeant took him forcibly from the railway station and recruited him into the Tatmadaw Kyi under threat of imprisonment. The recruitment personnel registered him under a false name even though he was 11 years old. After undergoing basic training, he was posted to an artillery battery. The child remained in the Tatmadaw Kyi for approximately two years and eight months before running away to return to his home. Subsequently, out of fear of being arrested for desertion, he decided that it was safest to submit himself for recruitment to the Tatmadaw Kyi in a different unit. Although he was still underage, he was recruited again under a falsified name and age. He served another two years in his new unit before running away again, but was caught and arrested for desertion. He was convicted for desertion and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. He was transferred to a convict labour camp and was required to plant rubber trees and perform sentry duty. In October 2008, he attempted to escape but was again caught. He was charged with escaping, given an additional one year on his original sentence and sent to a quarry labour camp. His case was bought to the attention of ILO and he was eventually released from prison. All charges were subsequently dropped and he was formally discharged from the Tatmadaw Kyi. Upon his release, he was suffering from scabies, malaria and suspected hepatitis, with associated liver problems, and he has been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. He is currently undergoing medical treatment;

- Another boy was also recruited when he was 11 years old. He met a civilian army recruiting agent at a monastery and was taken and recruited into the Tatmadaw Kyi. After a period of time, the child was able to make contact with his parents and with ILO intervention, he was discharged. The recruitment officer responsible for his recruitment received only a reprimand. Ten months after the child was discharged, he was again recruited into the Tatmadaw Kyi. On that occasion, he was accosted at the Mandalay railway station while waiting for his train to go home to Yangon. Despite declaring his age and the fact that he had formal discharge papers, he was taken to the recruiting office. He refused to cooperate and was beaten until he did. He managed to get word

to his family and again, with ILO intervention, he was discharged from the Tatmadaw Kyi;

- A 15-year-old boy presented himself to a recruitment centre and was rejected due to the fact that he had not yet attained the minimum age. He was told to return when he was 18 years old. Given the family's dire poverty, his mother helped him to get into the army by presenting the birth certificate of her elder son, who was 19 years old. The recruiting officer accepted him, despite commenting that the boy did not look 19 years old. Upon completion of the training, his unit was posted to the front line; he ran away and, with ILO intervention, was discharged from the Tatmadaw Kyi.

14. According to official reports made available by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government continues to screen and release underage children found in its armed forces during the training process. The Government reported that, from December 2007 to December 2008, 76 children had been detected in various military training schools and released to their parents and guardians. It acknowledged that three of those cases had International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and/or ILO involvement. In fact, during that calendar year, ILO alone had submitted 31 cases for investigation, of which 18 had been released and discharged by 31 December 2008. However, in cases where children had not been released through the ILO mechanism or ICRC, the country task force has been unable to verify those releases.

15. For the period from October 2007 to March 2009, ILO has received a total of 40 cases of underage recruitment mostly based on complaints filed by parents and/or relatives through the ILO complaints mechanism and has verified the release of 28 of these children. An additional 12 cases either await Government response or remain open while the process continues. Most of the cases reported to ILO relate to forced military recruitment by the Tatmadaw, which mainly occurs in major cities, which would appear to confirm that the level of awareness as to the right to complain is low in most of the country.

16. The complaints lodged have been dealt with expeditiously by the Government's Working Group for the elimination of forced labour. They are, however, considered to represent only a small portion of the total problem, due to a general lack of knowledge as to the right to lodge a complaint and the fear of retribution for registering a complaint. ILO reports that, where a complaint is accompanied by the documentation of age, clear identification details and the specific location of the recruit, the victim is invariably discharged to their parents or guardians. Without a specific ILO complaint, the Government does not actively seek out children in the army or take proactive action on requests to investigate, even when released children confirm the presence of other children in their units. Hence, although the Government expresses commitment to the non-recruitment of children into the Tatmadaw and, when faced with firm evidence, acts positively on that evidence, there remains a reticence to expand this to a more developed and open monitoring function. It is hoped that substantive discussions with the Government can be held shortly, with a view to agreeing on a cooperative, expanded working procedure to supplement the existing ILO mechanism.

Chin National Front/Chin National Army[1]

17. The Chin National Front/Chin National Army (CNF/CNA) shared a copy of their "deed of commitment" with the United Nations on 15 March 2009, reaffirming that the group does not recruit any persons under the age of 18, and reiterating its commitment to facilitate independent monitoring by a third party, as well as to develop a time-bound action plan in accordance with Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). CNF/CNA also requested appropriate assistance by the United Nations and non-governmental organizations to address the physical and psychological well-being and social reintegration of demobilized or released children formerly with CNA. The country task force will seek to follow up on this within the coming months.

Democratic Karen Buddhist Army

18. Information received from reliable sources through the country task force confirms that many children, armed and in military uniforms, have been observed with the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) in Karen State. DKBA has, however, denied recruiting children.

Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army

19. Children are assumed to be present in the ranks of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). However, according to KIA, any person under the age of 18 who attempts to join the group is not accepted and is sent to school instead. The country task force was unable to establish contact with this group in the reporting period.

Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council

20. Children are assumed to be present with the KNU/KNLA Peace Council. The group has informed the United Nations that it does not recruit persons under the age of 20 into its ranks.

Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army

21. The country task force received verified reports from camps in the border areas of two cases of child recruitment by KNU/KNLA during the reporting period.

22. Details of the incidents are as follows:

- A 14-year-old boy escaped from KNU in January 2008 after being forced to join the group in September 2006. The boy is currently in hiding, as he believes the battalion commander is searching for him;
- On 12 February 2009, a 14-year-old boy accompanied a KNU medical officer to the KNU military base, following the officer's visit to the refugee camp. The boy is currently in the custody of KNU Brigade 4, Battalion 10, led by Commander La Hser.

[1] This group was not included in the first report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Myanmar (S/2007/666).

Karenni National Progressive Party/Karenni Army

23. The country task force received verified reports from camps along the border areas of three cases of children associated with KNPP/KA during the reporting period.

24. Details of two incidents are as follows:

- In June 2008, a 16-year-old boy travelled from his camp to a KNPP base and presented himself for recruitment. KNPP accepted him. Although his family has made five visits to the KNPP base to request that the child be returned to his camp, their requests have been refused by KNPP soldiers. The parents reportedly sighted approximately 20 children at the base;
- A 17-year-old boy travelled to a KNPP base in June 2008, as he wanted to become a soldier. He was accepted by KNPP and spent three days at the base, doing cleaning and digging tasks. However, his mother found him and took him back to the refugee camp.

25. Following its continued listing in the annexes of my seventh report (S/2007/757), the KNPP leadership issued a communiqué to my Special Representative in February 2009, highlighting the fact that they have invited the United Nations on several occasions to monitor its military bases and areas of operations and have offered open and independent access for compliance verification, as well as expressed their willingness to dialogue with the United Nations. The United Nations has been prevented from doing so by the Government of Myanmar to date. KNPP reiterated its non-underage recruitment policy and appealed that the group be removed from the annexes.

Karenni National People's Liberation Front

26. Children are reportedly present in the Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), although the country task force has been unable to determine the full extent of children's association with the group. However, in August 2008, the country task force verified the case of a 16-year-old boy who had escaped from KNPLF. He reported that he had become a soldier in 2006 and had been assigned to do manual labour.

Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (Kokang)/Kokang Army

27. Reliable information received in March 2009 through the country task force indicates that every household in Kokang Army areas with more than one child has to provide at least one child to the group. According to the reports, both boys and girls, including those under the age of 15, are recruited; and families who have more daughters than sons will, in most cases, send their girl children. The country task force will seek to follow up on these reports in the coming months.

Shan State Army-South and Shan National Population Liberation Organization[2]

28. Credible reports have been received that in Shan State Army-South villages (SSA-S) and areas of Hsi Saing and Phe Khone townships, Southern Shan,

[2] This group was not included in the first report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Myanmar (S/2007/666).

controlled by the Shan National Population Liberation Organization (SNPLO) communities are requested to provide two recruits yearly. There is no confirmed indication as to the age of those recruited, although there is reasonable suspicion that many may be underage. The country task force has not been able to verify this information, as there is no access to those areas.

29. In a media report on 10 February 2009, SSA-S leader, Colonel Yawdserk, denied reports that the group recruits children and invited the United Nations to carry out investigation and verification visits. This is being followed up by the country task force.

United Wa State Army

30. Eyewitness reports to the country task force indicate the presence of uniformed children, many clearly under the age of 18, in the United Wa State Army (UWSA). A visit by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to the Wa State in January 2008 confirmed those sightings (see para. 51). Children can be regularly observed riding on UWSA pick-up trucks or manning UWSA checkpoints. Witness accounts from some villages in Southern Wa indicate an existence of a mechanism of recruitment, whereby village tract authorities are requested to provide three to four children, preferably boys or young men, on a yearly basis. The village tract authorities select which villages will be involved, and in the selected villages, households are selected on a rotational basis. This is apparently perceived by villagers as non-negotiable, and can therefore lead to selected households hiding other children by not sending them to school and keeping them at home to carry out daily chores, if their sibling is recruited. The Central Wa Authority usually justifies child recruitment on social grounds, that is, as an opportunity for them to receive free education and food. The older children (12 to 18 years old) undergo direct military training, whereas the younger children (6 to 11 years old) are sent to military-run schools and are later recruited.

31. Information received from reliable sources in Northern Wa highlighted that, in cases where a household does not have boys to "contribute", the Wa authorities request girl children. Most of the children are aged 10 and above, although in some instances much younger children were recruited. The children live in training camps and are educated there by UWSA. It has been observed that the children are used in supporting roles. For example, during the bazaar day in Namtit, Northern Wa, young recruits, usually accompanied by their team leader, are tasked with purchasing materials and supplies for the camps.

B. Denial of humanitarian access

32. The delivery of humanitarian assistance by United Nations agencies and other humanitarian organizations in Myanmar to vulnerable populations, the majority of which are children, remains limited at present in many relevant parts of the country, particularly in contested and ceasefire areas. The Government continues to cite security concerns as a reason for refusing access, although there is no evidence that security is a serious problem and particular groups have offered security assurances to United Nations staff. In addition, the Government itself, in a letter dated 28 April 2009, asserted that "the insurgency no longer exists in Myanmar" (see para. 48). Furthermore, the Government insistence on Government liaison officers

accompanying international staff of many United Nations agencies and international NGOs on all trips to the field (outside Nargis-affected areas) is a serious impediment to the independent and efficient operation of the humanitarian programmes.

33. Access impediments, such as delays in processing permits for internal travel and for the movement of relief commodities, are sometimes caused by the multiple level authorizations required in some areas. This has a detrimental impact on the speed at which humanitarian aid is made available to children. For example, United Nations and humanitarian organizations are required to apply for separate travel permits with the Wa district and township authorities on a weekly or monthly basis, in addition to the mandatory registration of all staff to the Central Wa authorities.

34. Reluctance by Government authorities to support community participatory and technical assessment of needs is also hampering the effective targeting of relief assistance to vulnerable populations, including children.

35. Following the initial hesitancy of the Government to allow access to United Nations and international relief agencies to the victims of cyclone Nargis including hundreds of children, in May 2008, the Government acknowledged the need for international relief efforts to complement those of national actors when the extent of the impact of the cyclone became evident. Since then, access has largely been unimpeded to date with some sporadic exceptions. United Nations agencies and international NGOs are stressing the need for the Government to allow and facilitate similar access to all vulnerable areas of the country, especially contested and ceasefire areas.

C. Killing and maiming of children

36. According to the Landmine Monitor,[3] both Government troops and non-State armed groups, such as KNLA, KA, DKBA, SSA-S, UWSA and the Monland Restoration Party, continued to use anti-personnel mines in 2007 and 2008 in order to restrict the movement of people, hinder the movement of troops, or to mark areas of operations. The report indicates that there were at least 463 new casualties caused by mines and unexploded remnants of war from January 2007 to 28 April 2008, although disaggregated data by gender and age of victims is unavailable.

37. Villagers and internally displaced persons, including children, in locations along the eastern border areas of Myanmar continue to suffer serious threats to their lives from the effects of the use of anti-personnel mines. In one case verified by the country task force, on 25 January 2008, a 10-year-old boy from Kayin State stepped on a mine and suffered serious wounds to his right leg, which was later amputated at the hospital. The mine had been buried at the perimeter of an army camp, indicating that it was meant to protect the army base and was thus unlikely to have been laid by an insurgent group.

[3] Landmine Monitor is the research and monitoring initiative of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the de facto monitoring regime for the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction (Mine Ban Treaty). It independently and impartially monitors and reports on States Parties' implementation of and compliance with the Mine Ban Treaty.

38. UNICEF reports that there have not been any official records on child victims of anti-personnel mines from hospitals in areas where it operates. However, according to the Government, although the national health management information system compiles health and hospital data from all states and divisions, the Ministry of Health does not separate injuries due to mines or unexploded remnants of war from other traumatic injuries. In addition, due to the limited scope of data collection and a lack of access to contested and ceasefire areas of the country, many casualties remain unreported.

D. Rape and other grave sexual violence

39. In November 2008, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed deep concern at the high prevalence of rape and other forms of grave sexual violence perpetrated against rural women from the Shan, Mon, Karen, Palaung and Chin ethnic groups by members of the armed forces; the apparent impunity of the perpetrators of such violence; and at reports of threats against and intimidation and punishment of victims. In one case, on 27 December 2008, a soldier allegedly from the Light Infantry of Burma (LIB 350), abducted, raped and killed a 7-year-old girl near her house in Ma Oo Bin village, Karen State. To date, no reported action has been taken to bring the perpetrator to justice.

40. Owing to limited access to the relevant contested and ceasefire areas of the country, the country task force was unable to obtain more information on cases of rape and sexual violence against children by parties to the conflict. The country task force requires unrestricted access to such areas of concern, in addition to strengthening its efforts to improve sexual violence reporting.

E. Abduction of children

41. As described under section III.A, there are numerous reports of children being abducted by Tatmadaw forces for recruitment purposes. In urban areas, the target areas for child recruitment include crowded locations, such as railway stations or the streets where children are working or begging. In rural areas, children have been reported to have been abducted while on the way to or from school.

42. According to reports received by the country task force, the typical technique often used by military recruiters is to threaten children with arrest or imprisonment on fictitious charges, such as truancy or loitering, and give them the choice of prosecution or enlistment into the Tatmadaw forces. The children are subsequently enrolled in recruitment centres before being sent for military training.

IV. Dialogue and action plans to redress violations of children's rights

A. Progress on dialogue and action plans with the Government of Myanmar

43. The Government agreed to update the Tatmadaw Kyi action plan to bring it in line with international standards in conjunction with the country task force as part of

several commitments made to my Special Representative during her visit in July 2007.

44. The co-Chair of the United Nations country task force met with the Government's monitoring and reporting task force on the prevention of military recruitment of underage children to advance discussions on the action plan development and implementation on 24 December 2008 and 12 March 2009. On 27 March 2009, the country task force shared with the Government a copy of the draft action plan. Among the critical components of the revised action plan is the need for independent, unaccompanied access by the United Nations to recruitment centres, camps and training centres for monitoring, reporting and verification of compliance; the need for access to all non-State actors to facilitate dialogue on action plans; and to ensure the security and safety of monitors and witnesses. This would include providing access to the United Nations to verify that no retaliatory action has been taken against witnesses or victims. The Government confirmed that officials from various line ministries, in particular the Ministry of Defence, are currently holding detailed discussions and reviewing the document thoroughly. Regrettably, to date, there has been no formal full meeting between the country task force and Government high-level Committee. The country task force looks forward to such a full meeting being held shortly.

B. Progress on dialogue and action plans with non-State actors

45. The Security Council Working Group, in its conclusions of July 2008, requested that my Special Representative consider ways and means, in close consultation with the Government of Myanmar, to transmit the message of the Chairman of the Working Group to the leaders of the armed groups mentioned in my report S/2007/666.

46. Pursuant to the above, the Government has facilitated initial meetings with the KNU-KNLA Peace Council and DKBA, with additional meetings to further discuss proposed action plans. Whereas the country task force is prepared to engage with KNU and KNPP, the Government remains reticent to allow any dialogue with these groups. An initial discussion was also carried out with UWSA following its commitment to engage in an action plan with the country task force. It is important to bear in mind the humanitarian imperative to support the release, reintegration and rehabilitation of children associated with these groups as a matter of priority.

Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army and the Karenni National Progressive Party/Karenni Army

47. During her mission to Myanmar in July 2007, my Special Representative received the permission of the Prime Minister, then Secretary-1, Lieutenant General Thein Sein, for the country task force in Myanmar to take the lead in engaging with KNU and KNPP in the light of their declared commitments to cease the recruitment and use of children according to Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005), to demobilize and release children in their ranks, and to allow for independent verification by the United Nations of compliance. In line with that commitment, the country task force in Myanmar was prepared to undertake discussions with KNU, KNPP and other relevant parties in order to finalize an action plan to cease the recruitment and use of children in the border areas. The

permission was subsequently rescinded by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in his discussions with my Special Representative in September 2008.

48. My Special Representative had transmitted the message of the Chairman of the Working Group to the country task forces in Myanmar and Thailand, respectively, for necessary action with KNU and KNPP. The task forces have, however, been unable to make contact with those groups to date, primarily due to resistance from the Government of Myanmar to allow access to those groups by the United Nations, despite the fact that such contact would not imply political or legal recognition of those non-State parties. On 5 March 2009, my Special Representative sent a letter to the Government of Myanmar indicating her concern about the lack of access to KNU and KNPP, and seeking clarification on its official policy regarding cooperation between the country task force and those groups. On 28 April 2009, my Special Representative received a reply from the Government of Myanmar to the effect that it was not feasible to arrange a meeting with KNU/KNPP, as "the insurgency no longer exists in Myanmar, but there are only a few who have taken refuge in the neighbouring country".

Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army

49. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, together with three members of the country task force visited Kayin (Karen) State on 15 and 16 February 2009, and met with leaders of the KNU-KNLA Peace Council and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) who have both concluded a ceasefire agreement with the Government. Both factions denied recruiting children as soldiers and confirmed their preparedness to engage with the country task force, including by allowing it access to undertake monitoring and reporting activities, as well as verification at their bases pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). The country task force is currently negotiating dates with the Government to follow up on this initiative with a view to advancing action plan commitments with those groups.

United Wa State Army

50. Following the visit of my Special Representative, the country task force met with representatives of UWSA to arrange the modalities for an initial joint assessment visit by the country task force to Northern Shan State at the earliest possible time. The purpose of the visit was to deepen discussions with Wa State authorities on the recruitment and use of children, conduct an assessment of the presence of children in UWSA and the ways in which the country task force could support their protection and reintegration.

51. In November 2007, the country task force made a second request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that it facilitate a meeting with the Wa State authorities, in order to carry out the agreed joint assessment visit. The invitation was granted on 28 December 2008, although the purpose of the visit was restricted to observing the developments in the region. UNICEF, on behalf of the country task force, met Wa authorities of Wa Special Region 2 (Wa Region, Eastern Shan State) in January 2008 and visited two military camps. UWSA was managing and running six primary schools at those camp sites, which was worrisome, given the allegations of recruitment and use of child soldiers. The Wa authorities reiterated that the students

were not given military training nor were they engaged in active combat, although children were used in supporting roles, such as cleaning, cooking, etc. According to the UWSA Deputy Commander, his group had stopped recruiting children since the ceasefire with the Government, but UNICEF observed many children among UWSA Brigade 418. It was also observed in one camp school that all children were attired in military uniform.

52. The Vice Chairman of Wa Special Region 2 expressed his displeasure at the fact that UWSA had been listed on the annexes of my report without any prior discussions with the Wa authorities, but agreed to cooperate with the United Nations on an action plan with a view to the group being removed from the list. No further assessment was carried out and there have been no further contact with the Wa authorities to date.

V. Follow-up to conclusions of the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict

53. Beyond initial limited dialogue with the Government in relation to the action plan(s), progress has been made in a number of respects in follow-up to the recommendations in my first report (S/2007/666) and the subsequent conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.51/2008/8), including significant steps by national authorities outlined in further detail below.

54. The country task force in Myanmar met in August 2008 and expressed a commitment to follow up on the conclusions of the Working Group and extend support to the Government for their implementation, in particular with regard to: (a) preparation and implementation of time-bound action plans by the Government and non-State armed groups pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005); (b) monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children with unhindered access and facilitated travel, including to recruitment camps and training centres; (c) the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups; (d) education and awareness-raising campaigns, including continued training of military recruitment officers; and (e) accession by the Government to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

55. A letter signed by the co-chairs of the country task force was sent to the Minister for Foreign Affairs to request for a meeting with the high-level Committee for the Prevention of Military Recruitment of Underage Children, with the aim of discussing the issues outlined above, to assist in integrating the recommendations of the Working Group into an action plan and to support their implementation. While a meeting between the high-level Committee and the country task force to further discuss these elements has been agreed in principle, no date has been set.

56. The national authorities in Myanmar have informed the United Nations, through regular reports that are being received by the country task force, that they have undertaken a number of important initiatives to address the issue of underage recruitment into military service since my last report. However, it remains difficult to assess or verify the practical implementation of these commitments. It is also important to note that, although there are signs of commitment to sustain the eradication of the recruitment and use of children by high-level representatives in

the Government, awareness and adherence to this commitment by officials at the lower levels are limited. This further reinforces the need for the finalization of an action plan with the Government and an effective and strengthened monitoring mechanism to close the gap between the policy and its application. Increased awareness-raising as to rights and responsibilities under the law and serious enforcement of the law through meaningful penalties for perpetrators would be a critical part of such a strategy.

57. In February 2008, in conformity with the commitments made to my Special Representative, the Government informed the country task force that it had put procedures in place for the rehabilitation and reintegration of underage recruits. However, in cases of children released through Government mechanisms, the country task force is not yet able to verify their release, as it has not been given addresses or other contact details, or the permission to access these children for follow-up purposes. Discussions with senior Government representatives have been initiated by the United Nations in order to address methods for accessing much larger groups of children who are not the subject of a specific complaint with ILO, and which necessitates the ability to undertake inspections of recruitment centres, training schools and camps in order to identify children, gain their release and subsequently support their reintegration and rehabilitation. The Government has, however, recently verbally agreed to provide the United Nations with the addresses and contact details of children released through Government mechanisms.

58. Details of children released and verified as already in the care of their families as a result of ILO interventions have been shared with UNICEF for rehabilitation and reintegration. UNICEF is working towards offering them appropriate support under its existing child-protection programme, subject to Government approval. No broader programme initiative is available at this time.

59. The Government further reported that it had discharged nine military recruitment officers from service for recruiting children in violation of the national military recruitment law, and that other administrative action had been taken against 43 officers for violating Military Defence Council directives on prevention of the recruitment of children. The country task force has not been able to verify these.

60. However, with regard to underage recruitment cases received and verified by ILO, although perpetrators have been identified under its mechanism, to date none of them has been discharged for contravening military regulations or prosecuted under the Penal Code for their actions. ILO notes that, the administrative penalties imposed on military personnel held responsible for underage recruitment had been extended beyond the previous standard of a reprimand recorded on the personnel file to encompass more serious reprimands, the loss of wages or the loss of seniority. It is important to recall that the recruitment of underage children into the army is a criminal offence under Myanmar Law (Penal Code, section 374), which could result in imprisonment for up to 12 months, or a fine, or both.

61. In addition, the Government has accepted the principle that an underage recruit cannot be found guilty of desertion, although it is not clear whether the policy itself has been amended to ensure that minors are not charged with desertion in the first place. In February and June 2008, the Government overturned two cases of conviction of underage recruits imprisoned for desertion, and in May 2008, the Government agreed to facilitate the discharge of an underage recruit who had run away and left the country. Notwithstanding these cases, more awareness-raising is

needed to ensure that the "desertion" of underage recruits from the army is not considered a crime in the first place, and therefore should not be subject to any criminal charge and/or imprisonment.

62. According to the Government, the Directorate of Military Strength continues to organize a number of training activities for active service personnel of various ranks in all military training schools to promote the Government's policy of non-recruitment of persons under the age of 18 years, while the Judge Advocate-General's Office continues to carry out lectures on international law, particularly on the prevention of recruitment of children, to officers from subordinate regiments and companies of Regional Commands, Divisional Supervision Commands and the Military Administration School.

VI. Response to grave violations

63. In Myanmar, the country task force is in the process of strengthening the monitoring and reporting mechanism within the framework of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). In order to achieve this, a dedicated monitoring and reporting team is necessary to carry out the monitoring in a vigilant and independent manner, to report on grave violations against children and to ensure vigorous follow-up on reports, as well as on agreed actions, with relevant Government focal points. A full team would initially require two international staff and one international interpreter, with the option of phasing in a third international staff member and a second international interpreter in the second year, all with appropriate visa status that would allow them mobility to discharge their functions. ILO, as part of the country task force, is in discussion with a donor to secure funding for a monitor and associated support personnel.

64. The country task force, in coordination with the Government of Myanmar, also undertook the following programmatic responses for affected children in the reporting period:

- UNICEF, supported by ILO and ICRC, provided four training courses to military recruitment officers, as well as for staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Labour, the General Administration Authority, police and prison services on international law, Myanmar child laws and Military Defence Council directives, and prevention of child recruitment. The Department of Social Welfare, in collaboration with Save the Children and World Vision, organized similar training in November 2007 and December 2008 with technical support from ILO. The Government has committed to continuing this collaboration with the country task force;
- ILO has undertaken six awareness-raising activities on forced labour and child recruitment with the local authorities at the district/township level, as well as in informal village level meetings. ILO presentations were made in two Deputy Township Judges training programmes in April 2008 and 2009;
- Pocket cards on the Child Protection Code of Conduct for Soldiers were provided by UNICEF to the Ministry of Defence for distribution to military personnel;
- The Department of Social Welfare and Save the Children promoted community awareness on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1959

Myanmar Defence Services Act as they pertain to underage recruitment, and distributed instructional pamphlets discussing ways to address child recruitment cases with the authorities.

65. The monitoring and reporting mechanism has been formally established in all nine refugee camps in the border areas in 2008, and is supported by training and awareness-raising activities for camp residents. The responsibilities for verifying cases, as well as awareness-raising on the mechanism in general, and on the issue of child recruitment in particular, have been divided between United Nations agencies. As access to confirm and receive allegations of child recruitment is currently limited to the camps, the mechanism will be extended in 2009 to encompass monitoring, reporting and verifying of information to areas outside of the camps.

VII. Recommendations

66. **While the steps taken to date are appreciated, the Government of Myanmar is strongly urged to put into place a tighter mechanism to prevent the recruitment of children and to demobilize unconditionally all children who participate in any capacity in its armed forces, in coordination with the country task force on monitoring and reporting.**

67. **The Government should, in conjunction with the country task force on monitoring and reporting, address methods for accessing all children who are not the subject of a specific complaint through the ILO mechanism. These should include full and unhindered access of country task force personnel to recruitment centres, training centres and military camps in order to undertake inspections, identify and separate children, and support their reintegration and rehabilitation.**

68. **In addition, the Government is encouraged to maintain and strengthen the application of the ILO Supplementary Understanding complaints mechanism.**

69. **The Government is urged, without further delay, to engage with the country task force to finalize the action plan in line with international standards to prevent recruitment of children and release all children associated with armed forces and groups in Myanmar. To this end, the action plan should provide for: the independent, unaccompanied access by the country task force to recruitment centres, military camps and training centres to monitor, report and verify compliance; access to all non-State actors to facilitate dialogue to conclude action plans for the release and effective reintegration of children; the assurance of security and safety of monitors, witnesses and victims; as well as the establishment of a credible age-verification mechanism.**

70. **The Government is urged to redress the prevailing culture of impunity, to launch investigations into all incidents of recruitment and use of children, to prosecute persons responsible for such acts under the Penal Code, or via instructions or orders, as a matter of priority. Disciplinary processes and action against those responsible for aiding and abetting the recruitment of children, including civilian brokers and some personnel at all levels of the armed forces, must be systematized and institutionalized, and incentives for the recruitment of children removed. To this end, the disciplinary process should be open and transparent and allow for independent verification by the country task force.**

71. **Building on the limited progress thus far, the Government should, with immediate effect, cease the arrest, harassment and imprisonment of children under the age of 18 for desertion and/or attempting to leave the army, and continue to work with the country task force to monitor such cases and to ensure the swift and unconditional release of the children. To this end, the Government is urged to align its relevant policies to ensure that children are not charged with desertion in the first place, and therefore should not be subject to any criminal charge, imprisonment and/or any other form of harassment.**

72. **The Government is encouraged to sign and ratify as early as possible the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to align national legislation and practice with that commitment.**

73. **While the facilitation by the Government with regard to the Karen National Union-Karenni National Liberation Army Peace Council and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army is recognized, the Government is urged to remove access restrictions on the United Nations to all other non-State actors, as well as to contested and ceasefire areas, in order to facilitate the necessary discussions of the country task force with those actors and allow regular visits to recruitment centres, training centres and military camps to monitor and verify the absence of children under the age of 18.**

74. **The continued inability of the country task force to access and meet the Karen National Union and Karenni National Progressive Party remains a concern. The concerned Governments are encouraged to assist in this effort of the country task force and facilitate its immediate engagement with KNU and KNPP, in the light of their declared commitments to cease the recruitment and use of children, in order to enable monitoring and independent verification of compliance, and to provide appropriate assistance to demobilize, reintegrate and rehabilitate children from those groups.**

75. **The continued lack of humanitarian access in Myanmar, particularly in contested and ceasefire areas, is an impediment to providing much needed humanitarian assistance. Under the principle of the "best interest of the child" the Government is called upon to ensure full, unhindered and safe humanitarian access for children, to allow free passage for the delivery of humanitarian assistance by the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations to all parts of the country, without exception, and to respect the exclusively impartial nature of humanitarian aid. In this regard, the Government is urged to facilitate and cooperate with United Nations efforts, through the provision of visas, in-country travel authorizations, unescorted access, confidentiality and security. While the largely unimpeded access given in the Delta is acknowledged, the Government is urged to facilitate similar access provisions to all vulnerable areas of the country.**

76. **It is recommended that the Government continue its comprehensive education and awareness-raising activities for the Tatmadaw Kyi, particularly regional commanders, military recruiters and active service personnel of various ranks in all military training schools at the national, regional and divisional levels, with support from the country task force. The activities should direct military personnel to refuse the recruitment of children, and instruct**

them on the investigation, prosecution and disciplinary actions that will be undertaken for recruitment in contravention of applicable international law, Myanmar national law and relevant Military Defence Council directives.

77. **The country task force should, in cooperation with the Government, strengthen its monitoring and reporting capacity with a view to improving its work, in particular to enhance monitoring and reporting on all grave violations against children in Myanmar through increased staffing and geographical coverage; to ensure the implementation of appropriate interventions to respond to these grave violations, including prevention, protection, release and reintegration support, and justice for children affected by armed conflict; as well as to sustain a reduction of instances of such grave violations.**

78. **The country task force is called upon to continue to establish systematic protection dialogue with all parties to the conflict with the goal of creating concrete, time-bound action plans to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers and to address other grave violations as appropriate.**

United Nations S/2009/279

Security Council

Distr.: General
1 June 2009

Original: English

Letter dated 26 May 2009 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to my letter of 5 March 2009 (S/2009/128), in which I recommended that the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA) be succeeded, initially until 31 December 2009, by a United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office (BINUCA), with a revised mandate and structure. In that regard, I indicated that temporary arrangements would be put in place to make the integrated office operational as soon as possible. In a statement by the President of the Security Council dated 7 April 2009 (S/PRST/2009/5), the Security Council welcomed my recommendation and requested me to ensure that a smooth transition to the new integrated office take place as soon as possible, including through the early deployment of the new Special Representative and Deputy Special Representative.

In pursuance of the above-mentioned, I wish to inform you of my intention to appoint Sahle-Work Zewde (Ethiopia) as my new Special Representative in the Central African Republic and head of BONUCA, which is to be succeeded by BINUCA.

I should be grateful if you would bring this letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) **Ban** Ki-moon

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ceremony of the final peace agreement be arranged, my Special Envoy would attend the gathering on my behalf.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my deep appreciation for the important work my Special Envoy has accomplished in discharging the difficult mandate with which he was entrusted on issues related to the northern Uganda peace process.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) **Ban** Ki-moon

United Nations S/2009/283

Security Council

Distr.: General
2 June 2009

Original: English

Letter dated 2 June 2009 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to convey the attached communication, dated 13 May 2009, which I received from the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would bring it to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) **Ban** Ki-moon

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Annex

Letter dated 13 May 2009 from the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to the Secretary-General

In accordance with Security Council resolutions 1386 (2001) and 1510 (2003), I attach a report on the operations of the International Security Assistance Force covering the period from August 2008 to January 2009. I would appreciate your making this report available to the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Jaap **de Hoop Scheffer**

Enclosure

Quarterly report to the Security Council on the operations of the International Security Assistance Force

Introduction

1. The present report, pursuant to the obligation under Security Council resolution 1386 (2001) to report to the United Nations on the progress of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission, covers the period from 1 August 2008 to 31 January 2009. As at 2 February 2009, total ISAF strength stood at 57,249 personnel from 26 NATO nations and 15 non-NATO nations.

2. Throughout the reporting period, ISAF continued to assist the Government of Afghanistan in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. From 1 August 2008 to 31 January 2009, ISAF suffered 777 casualties in total: 113 killed in action and 664 wounded in action. Key issues have been:

(a) ISAF continued to conduct security and stabilization operations while supporting governance, reconstruction and development. Security operations have been conducted with an emphasis on ensuring freedom of movement, particularly along the ring road, building the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces and assisting the Government with voter registration. In addition, the ISAF security footprint in Kabul has been reduced, while maintaining support to the Security Forces. Combined operations with the Security Forces have included the movement of critical electricity-generation equipment to the Kajaki dam, although as is the case with many infrastructure projects, delivery of the full benefit to the Afghan people will take many years;

(b) Every effort has been made to avoid civilian casualties and collateral damage. Procedures and processes are continually reviewed, and ISAF has implemented a new process to facilitate joint ISAF-Afghan investigations and hold joint press conferences in conjunction with the newly established Government Media and Information Centre as soon as information is available, in order to promote transparency;

(c) The focus of ISAF in the coming months will be to continue to support the efforts of the Afghan National Security Forces to provide security to the electoral process, including through the deployment of the Election Support Force for the election period. Additionally, ISAF will endeavour to increase cooperation, mentoring, planning and the combined execution of security operations with the Security Forces across the theatre. ISAF intends to maintain a high operational tempo throughout the winter months.

Security situation

3. Insurgent activity throughout Afghanistan was somewhat higher than in the same period last year. The unusually mild winter weather allowed opposing militant forces to remain active for longer than in previous winters rather than return to sanctuaries and their homes. The insurgents have avoided larger-scale direct engagements and tended to focus on improvised explosive device attacks and smaller-scale attacks against soft targets, such as Government officials and the Afghan National Police/Afghan National Security Forces. Insurgents have come under pressure in areas where they have not been challenged in the past, thus

forcing them to focus great effort on protecting their lines of communication and preserving their freedom of movement. The insurgents have also increased negative propaganda and shown greater indifference to civilian casualties during their operations. These factors — combined with the overall year-end statistics showing significant increases in casualties in 2008 — have created the perception that neither the Government of Afghanistan nor ISAF is able to provide adequate security to the Afghan people. Regional security situations are as follows:

(a) *Regional Command Capital*: The opposing militant forces sought to maintain the perception of a negative security situation in and around Kabul City by conducting several direct fire and improvised explosive device attacks. Several incidents occurred in this reporting period, the most significant being the ambush on an ISAF patrol in Surobi District. Other significant events include the assassination of Judge Alim Hanif, Chief Judge of the Central Narcotics Tribunal Appeals Court; the assassination of the Governor of Lowgar in Paghman District; and the 30 October 2008 suicide improvised explosive device attack against the Ministry of Information and Culture. Propaganda was employed to exploit those incidents. Despite those high-profile events, the Afghan National Security Forces has successfully assumed lead responsibility for many of the security tasks in Kabul previously conducted by ISAF. Despite the continuous threat of improvised explosive device attacks against high-profile/high-payoff targets, the overall security situation in Regional Command Capital has improved. However, the threat and a small number of isolated, high-profile incidents have created the perception that the insurgents maintain a strong influence surrounding the city of Kabul. ISAF assesses that the insurgents remain unable to gain the freedom of movement and operating areas required to "encircle" Kabul;

(b) *Regional Command North*: Insurgent violence remains mostly connected to the activities of criminal and illegal armed groups. The insurgents have attempted to spread violence outside the Pashtun areas, but have had limited success. Competing interests from regional power brokers and ethnic divisions continue to play a major role in limiting the spread of the insurgents' influence;

(c) *Regional Command West*: Insurgent activity in Regional Command West was focused on Farah and Badghis provinces. In Badghis province, Government influence and presence is limited, as local elders, opportunistic power brokers and criminals try to ensure that their interests prevail; the situation has worsened significantly since the release of Mullah Dastigir.[a] Farah remained a critical location for the insurgents, as it is an important insurgent junction linking safe havens to lines of communication;

(d) *Regional Command South*: The insurgency in Regional Command South remains the focal point for the Taliban, whose efforts are greatest in Helmand. This area is the traditional homeland of the Pashtun-dominated Taliban movement in Afghanistan. Across the region, improvised explosive device attacks continue to increase. The insurgents are also believed to be relying even more heavily on the narcotics industry for money, especially in the winter months;

(e) *Regional Command East*: Overall, continuing insurgent activity and weak governance in many Regional Command East provinces have limited the effect of ongoing ISAF military and reconstruction activities in the region. Activity

[a] Update: Mullah Dastigir was successfully targeted by coalition forces on 15 February 2009.

of opposing militant forces was high along the Afghan/Pakistan border. The opposing militant forces routinely transit the porous border to conduct hit-and-run attacks against ISAF, the coalition forces and the Afghan National Security Forces before retreating to illegal sanctuaries in Pakistan. Additionally, opposing militant forces' efforts to intimidate and target Government officials have increased, resulting in the death of Lowgar Governor Hazrat Din Nur. The extremely difficult terrain along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border and the limited number of ISAF combat troops to deny infiltrations into Afghanistan make it extremely difficult to limit insurgent activity in Regional Command East.

Afghan National Army

4. The Afghan National Army continues to make steady progress, increasing in capacity and capability while simultaneously conducting security and stabilization operations. Confirmation of this lies in greater leadership in the conduct of operations. However, development of the Afghan Ministry of Defence and the Afghan National Army Air Corps remains far behind that of the army combat forces, and an overall lack of training teams continues to hamper the speed of the Afghan National Army's development. While recent contributions of training teams by allies at the Summit is welcome, the continued expansion of the army will require more teams. Progress is summarized as follows:

(a) *Capability*: More than half of Afghan National Army units are currently partnering with ISAF and coalition forces during the conduct of security and stabilization operations. Thirty-three per cent of army units are capable of conducting security and stabilization operations at the battalion level with limited external support, although many such units continue to require active mentoring. Despite the upward trend, more must be done before the army can reach a level where it can operate independently and overcome the logistic challenges posed to it. Emphasis on development of the Ministry of Defence and the Afghan National Army Air Corps, outfitting forces with appropriate enablers and the establishment of a sustainable logistics support system are critical if the army is to be able to conduct independent operations;

(b) *Manning*: Manning numbers continue to climb, with approximately 79,000 personnel assigned as of January 2009, thus nearly achieving the former goal of 80,000. With the current manning, historical trends and projected fill rates, it is anticipated that the Afghan National Army will meet its desired manning end state of 134,000 in accordance with established timelines;

(c) *Equipment*: The United States of America continues to provide the bulk of equipment and financial support to the Afghan National Army, with other NATO nations providing substantive support. Although equipment donations remain insufficient, there has been progress in the nations' monetary donations to the NATO trust fund over the reporting period. Eight nations have contributed to the trust fund, and these donations have already supported the procurement of winter equipment and the transportation of previously donated items. The NATO equipment trust fund covers all key categories of the donation programme, that is, transportation costs, procurement of equipment, training, infrastructure and sustainment. With the United States continuing to equip the army and nations' improved support to the NATO trust fund, it is projected that the army will meet its equipment fielding requirements in accordance with the established plan;

(d) *Training*: NATO operational mentoring and liaison teams and United States embedded training teams are proving invaluable to supporting the development of the army. However, the increasing requirement for additional teams persists. This situation significantly undermines the development of the army and, indirectly, the Afghan National Police. Currently, approximately 80 per cent of the required teams have been fielded, an increased percentage from the previous reporting period. However, with the continued increase in the number of army units and insufficient offers of operational mentoring liaison teams to meet this expansion, it is projected that the shortfall of teams will increase by December 2009. In addition to the requirement for deployment of teams, the hesitancy of nations to actively support Afghan National Army branch schools is likely to impede the development of the army. These schools play a vital role in the long-term development of the army;

(e) *Afghan National Army Air Corps*: Over the past year, almost entirely financed by the United States, the Afghan National Army Air Corps has expanded its training and its contribution to army operations throughout Afghanistan. At present, there are approximately 2,300 personnel in the Air Corps, and that number is growing. Despite minimal involvement by NATO and ISAF, Afghan National Army Air Corps training is progressing. With the proper support, the Air Corps will soon become the leading enabler for the entire Afghan National Army; however, for the Air Corps to achieve the self-sufficiency and mission capability required to support the growing ranks of the army within the available time, it will depend heavily on international coalition and NATO help. NATO support for the Air Corps consists mainly of equipment donations to the Government of Afghanistan. NATO is staffing a Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan request for pilot and maintenance instructors. This increased support will be vital to the continued development of the Air Corps.

Afghan National Police

5. While supporting the Afghan National Police is not under the direct responsibility of ISAF, the inability to develop the Afghan National Police as quickly as the Afghan National Army remains one of the most significant problems in establishing security and the rule of law in Afghanistan. Although there are a number of initiatives to improve police development, the Afghan National Police remains far behind the Afghan National Army. The focused district development, capital jumpstart and focused border development programmes are promising initiatives helping to build the capacity of the police. With approximately 79,000 personnel assigned, the Afghan National Police has nearly achieved its goal of an 82,000-man force; however, the number of adequately trained personnel remains low, and problems of absenteeism and corruption persist. Therefore, unless substantive support is provided in the near term by the international coalition in the form of police mentors and equipment support, the Afghan National Police will continue to fall further behind in their development, increasing the amount of time required to develop an effective force. The key programmes are progressing as follows:

(a) The focused district development programme, executed by the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, has started in 52 selected districts and is a focal point of the international coalition engagement for Afghan National Police development. Germany started in January 2009 to conduct focused district

development in Regional Command North. As the programme contributes positively to the security of the selected districts, the Afghan Ministry of the Interior has approved the continuation and expansion of the programme into additional districts starting in January 2009. Confidence in the trained Afghanistan National Civil Order Police is increasing and could improve Afghan perceptions of their police institutions. The persistent shortage of police mentor teams assigned to the focused district development programme will prolong the programme if not addressed by the nations;

(b) The European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan increasingly contributes to the development of the Afghan National Police, including in the fields of anti-corruption, criminal investigation, the rule of law and training. The EU decision to double the size of the mission, currently being implemented, has given renewed impetus to the mission;

(c) Focused border development has commenced and is aimed at retraining the Afghan Border Police in an effort to stem the tide of insurgents entering districts bordering Pakistan. Over the reporting period, some 1,200 Border Police went through the focused border development programme and another 5,000 are expected to do so by September 2009. Equipping the Afghan Border Police remains a critical shortfall.

Counter-narcotics

6. ISAF operations have continued to focus on cross-agency coordination and on seeking to disrupt the narcotics industry though support to the Government of Afghanistan and the international community. ISAF provincial reconstruction teams have continued to work towards providing guidance to provincial planners, which has contributed to the promotion of alternative-livelihood programmes and has been reinforced by ISAF information operations. It is recognized that the illicit narcotics industry continues to be a factor in funding of the insurgency. Evidence exists that money linked to narcotics production and trafficking is being used to directly finance some insurgent operations. ISAF has continued to provide logistical and intelligence support to Afghan forces, operating within the current counter-narcotic mandate and resources. In accordance with the Budapest Defence Ministers meeting of 10 October 2008, ISAF has sought to enhance its support to the Afghan forces and target the nexus between the insurgency and the illegal narcotics industry. Narcotics production continues to contribute to instability and corruption, directly threatening all levels of governance, including police authority and the wider rule of law. ISAF support for the Government's key counter-narcotic interdiction forces is aimed at delivering an effect that actively discourages narcotic production and trafficking, without directly engaging in operations against cultivation or farmers. Within the current mandate and in accordance with international law and the ISAF rules of engagement, the actions taken will be in accordance with the NATO policy to avoid civilian casualties to the maximum extent possible.

Governance

7. Although there have been some encouraging initiatives, overall progress in establishing effective national and subnational institutions in Afghanistan remains slow. The Government's limited reach and lack of capability to deliver security, economic and social services evenly across the country, coupled with widespread

corruption, impede efforts to stem the insurgency. These problems, combined with a severe shortage of professional, trained personnel, limit the ability of the Government to deliver visible progress. Warlords, criminals (particularly narco-criminals) and senior tribal figures continue to undermine central and provincial government authority for their own ends, while all levels and institutions of Government continue to struggle against corruption (including the police and the judiciary). The development of effective, professional and sustainable Government institutions at the subnational level is urgently required to gain popular support for the Government; however, achieving reform will be slow. Most of the ministries remain ineffective, under-resourced and lacking in skilled or experienced personnel, and this lack of institutional capacity makes it difficult for ministries to administer and disburse development funds. While surveys indicate a broad degree of popular support for President Karzai, the slow progress in improving governance carries a real danger that the Afghan population increasingly will turn to alternative local and regional mechanisms of governance.

8. Increasing domestic revenues remains a major challenge for the Government of Afghanistan. Central revenue collection is complicated by the political and tribal landscape, the security situation, widespread corruption and by the difficulty in imposing an effective tax regime on the large informal and rural economy of Afghanistan. Major improvements to the police and judicial system and to the tax and customs regime are required if Afghanistan is to be able to fund a substantial portion of the operating budget from domestic revenues in the near future. Given the current global economic downturn and the recent critical International Monetary Fund report on the country's financial health, it is certain that Afghanistan will remain reliant on the international community for the foreseeable future.

9. There are also some encouraging signs. In October 2008 the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board approved the Independent Directorate for Local Governance-initiated Afghan social outreach programme. This is the most significant Afghan initiative on subnational governance and will remain at the centre of attempts to improve the situation until the District Council elections planned for September 10. The programme is a local governance programme that will function through district shuras and community councils, whose members will be appointed through local consultation. It is an attempt to revitalize traditional collective decision-making processes whereby the community has a say in matters affecting it. The programme does have a security dimension, as it is intended to strengthen community security by enhancing the cohesion of that community, making it less vulnerable to extremist infiltration and intimidation. It has been specifically stated that councils will not arm community members or manage armed groups. A pilot programme has been run in Wardak Province for the past year, and initially negative reports have started to improve (community councils formed and projects being implemented). A new programme is due to start in Helmand province shortly.

Development

10. Over the reporting period, we have seen slow but steady progress in a number of development sectors. Access to food has increased thanks to lower food prices and improvements in the coordination of humanitarian aid. Considerable success has been achieved in the close cooperation between ISAF and the World Food Programme (WFP). The Government, ISAF and WFP successfully prepositioned food items for the winter season. Efforts to transport and distribute food are still

ongoing, and there is no indication of an immediate Afghanistan-wide food shortage. However, more donations from the international community are needed to avoid food shortages during the spring and summer of 2009. Low precipitation, high prices and a lack of access to improved seed and fertilizers have limited agricultural development. To transform the agricultural sector, investments from the private community will be required, but this is hampered by issues such as property rights, insufficient rule of law, continued corruption and insufficient access to energy resources.

11. Other basic human services have seen varying progress during the reporting period. Overall health care experienced some progress; however, urban health care remains better than rural. Education is also steadily improving, yet still suffers from the lack of security. Water resource management remains poor and requires much greater inter-ministerial and donor coordination to solve the issues. Electricity production has been making some progress, but overall production was down owing to the impact of the drought. Lack of Afghan capacity, insufficient investment and self-sustainability and security concerns hamper road construction and maintenance. On the positive side, 10 per cent of the ring road was completed in the last quarter. The main structures to monitor and coordinate development in relation to the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, together with the underlying committees and working groups, are off to a good start, but a lot of work still needs to be done in order to make them fully functional.

United Nations S/2009/284

Security Council

Distr.: General
2 June 2009

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1830 (2008)

I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 6 of its resolution 1830 (2008), the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to report to the Council on a quarterly basis on the fulfilment of the responsibilities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The present report is the third submitted pursuant to that resolution.

2. The report provides an update on United Nations activities in Iraq since the previous report (S/2009/102), dated 20 February 2009, with a focus on the steps taken to implement resolution 1830 (2008). It presents a summary of key political developments during the period under review, as well as regional and international events concerning Iraq. The report also provides an update on the activities of my Special Representative for Iraq, as well as on operational and security matters.

II. Summary of key political and security developments in Iraq

3. On 6 March, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki renewed calls for national reconciliation, including the need for outreach to former Baath Party cadres and officials. Sunni Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi stressed that the reconciliation process required time and entailed incentives, including the possibility of more powers through constitutional amendments for the Sunni constituency to overcome years of mistrust and fully take part in the political process.

4. The reconciliation process remains delicate and during the reporting period was marked by discontent among elements of the Awakening Councils and members of the Sons of Iraq regarding the non-payment of salaries and the incorporation of their members into the Iraqi Security Forces and other Government structures. Declining oil revenues have contributed to the problem, forcing the Government to drastically reduce its 2009 budget and freeze police recruitment. Tensions flared on 28 March when a prominent Awakening Council leader in central Baghdad was arrested for allegedly having been involved in sectarian violence in the past. However, although other Awakening Councils expressed concern about the arrest, the individual in question reportedly did not have wide support among Council leaders.

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5. Ayad al-Samarrai, a Tawafuq nominee (and Vice-President al-Hashemi's deputy in the Iraqi Islamic Party), was elected the new Speaker of Parliament during a parliamentary session held at the Council of Representatives on 19 April. This brought to a close the four-month political impasse that followed the resignation of the previous Speaker, Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, in December 2008. The new programme set out by the Speaker of Parliament includes accelerating the approval of pending legislation, promoting the Parliament's supervisory role, advancing preparations for the forthcoming parliamentary elections and ensuring closer follow-up of the affairs of independent commissions. The programme also includes completing outstanding tasks assigned to the Council of Representatives such as amendments to the Constitution and the work of various parliamentary committees, to include the committee considering article 23 of the provincial elections law, which has been tasked by the Council with finding a power-sharing formula prior to the provincial elections in Kirkuk.

6. The formal release of governorate election results by the Independent High Electoral Commission on 26 March set in motion the process of the formation of provincial councils in the 14 governorates where elections took place on 31 January 2009, including the selection of all governors and deputies for each province. In the central governorates, larger majorities were won, which made it easier for alliances to be forged and the allocation of senior posts to be concluded more quickly. In some southern governorates, the vote was split, making it more difficult for the newly elected Council members to reach a consensus.

7. Muthanna was the last Governorate to form its provincial council, with its new governor selected on 30 April. In Najaf, the Legal Committee of the Iraqi parliament has challenged the manner in which the governor was selected and there are indications that the issue might be settled by the Iraqi Supreme Court. In Ninawa, there is an ongoing dispute between the Kurdish-led Ninawa Fraternal List and the new al-Hadbaa List, which won the January provincial elections. Kurdish members of the provincial council are boycotting council meetings and have demanded that more posts be allocated for Kurds in the provincial government. On 8 May, the newly elected Governor from the al-Hadbaa List was blocked by Kurdish Peshmerga forces from attending a sports event in the Bashiqah subdistrict, leading to accusations on both sides. In response, the Governor and his supporters have demanded that the Kurdistan regional government withdraw its forces from all disputed areas in Ninawa. The situation remains a matter of serious concern.

8. Although the overall security situation in Iraq has improved since 2008, the recent spike in indiscriminate and violent mass attacks continues to cause unacceptably high civilian casualties, demonstrating that important security challenges remain. A new wave of suicide bombings took place, culminating in a coordinated series of four bomb blasts across Iraq on 23 March that resulted in at least 32 people dead and scores wounded. There were nearly 20 suicide bombings in April, with 355 Iraqis killed, making it the deadliest month in 2009, according to Iraqi officials. More than 80 Iranian pilgrims were also reportedly killed during the same month. On 20 May, a car bomb in north-west Baghdad killed 40 people and injured more than 70, followed the next day by a series of bombings in Baghdad and Kirkuk that killed at least 23 people and injured many more.

III. Activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

A. Political activities

9. During the reporting period, the activities of my Special Representative and the Mission focused with renewed urgency on the issue of the disputed internal boundaries of Iraq, with a view to promoting political dialogue between the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan regional government. As part of that effort, UNAMI completed a set of analytical reports on the disputed internal boundaries of northern Iraq, which was presented on 22 April to the Presidency Council of Iraq, the Prime Minister of Iraq and the President of the Kurdistan regional government. The reports, which took over a year to complete, were prepared following consultations with a wide range of Iraqi interlocutors, including senior Government officials and Members of Parliament. High-level consultations with Iraqi partners on the content and nature of the reports intensified in early April, ahead of its official submission. Subsequent briefings took place with the relevant parliamentary committees, including the article 23 committee, the article 140 committee and the Constitutional Review Committee.

10. Fifteen separate reports have been prepared on districts in four governorates across northern Iraq from the border with the Syrian Arab Republic to the border with the Islamic Republic of Iran, including Sinjar, Tal Afar, Til Kaef, Sheikhan, Akre, Hamdaniya and Makhmur districts in Ninawa Governorate; Al Hawija, Dibis, Daquq and Kirkuk districts in Kirkuk Governorate; Tuz district in Salahadin Governorate; and Kifri and Khanaqin, as well as the subdistrict of Mandali in Baladruz district, in Diyala Governorate. The overall product was the result of in-depth research into current conditions and competing narratives along mutually reinforcing lines of enquiry, carried out in close public consultation with various Iraqi authorities at the national, regional, governorate and local levels. Each district assessment contains recommendations on specific localized confidence-building measures and aims to provide the basis for further dialogue between Iraqi parties, including in support of local processes. Given that the lack of administrative clarity has caused a significant lack of service delivery in those areas, the analysis is also supported by a mapping of basic developmental needs.

11. Analytical rather than prescriptive in nature, the reports make no specific suggestions regarding the future administrative jurisdiction of these areas. The findings do not prejudice sovereign Iraqi processes already under way and are consistent with elements of the Constitution of Iraq. They further acknowledge that these sensitive issues cannot be dealt with in isolation and require the goodwill and firm commitment of the federal and regional governments to start a process of sustained dialogue not only on territorial matters, but also on broader security, revenue-sharing and constitutional issues.

12. The report included a discussion paper on the status of Kirkuk, for which UNAMI has offered four options, all of which use the Constitution of Iraq as the starting point for handling Kirkuk. The options treat the governorate as a single entity and require a political agreement among the parties over a transitional period which could then be endorsed by way of a confirmatory referendum.

13. During the reporting period, my Special Representative and the UNAMI political team reached out to a number of senior Iraqi political figures, Members of

Parliament, and independent and other provincial representatives from Kirkuk to discuss power-sharing in Kirkuk as well as developments in parts of Ninawa and Diyala. The Mission also engaged international partners that have consistently displayed strong and active support for the United Nations political initiative, with a view to reducing tensions.

14. In parallel, and at the request of the Speaker of Parliament, UNAMI continued to support the parliamentary committee on Kirkuk set up according to article 23 of the provincial elections law. UNAMI has been facilitating the work of the committee by providing secretariat, logistical and substantive support, as well as bringing in experts to advise the Committee on power-sharing, property claims and voter registration. The article 23 committee sought an extension of its mandate on 1 April for an additional two months to deliver its findings to the Parliament. While there seems to be an understanding in principle regarding the allocation of the top three posts of the provincial council, the allocation of lower-level government posts based on the ethnic quota system and a time frame for the implementation of a power-sharing agreement have yet to be agreed upon. Early in May, my Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs accompanied the members of the committee, as well as security chiefs from Kirkuk and members of the Provincial Council, to Northern Ireland. The purpose was to help the Kirkuki delegation learn about the experience of Northern Ireland and lessons that could be applicable to Kirkuk, in particular in the areas of power-sharing, policing reform and the constitutional status of the province in the light of the Good Friday Agreement and Northern Ireland's linkages to two separate entities.

B. Regional dialogue

Regional developments

15. The reporting period witnessed a number of high-level visits to Iraq, which served to further strengthen bilateral contacts between Iraq and its neighbours. On 27 February, President Jalal Talabani led a delegation to Tehran, followed by visits to Baghdad by the former President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, Ali Larijani. On 7 March, President Talabani visited Ankara; then, on 23 March, the President of Turkey, Abdullah Gül, visited Baghdad. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, and the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, visited Baghdad in February and April, respectively. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, Walid al-Moualem, visited on 25 March. On 21 March the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Amr Moussa, visited Baghdad and promised a more active role by the League in the areas of national reconciliation, electoral preparation and reconstruction in Iraq. Those visits underscore the fact that a concerted effort is under way to strengthen bilateral relations between the Government of Iraq and its neighbours.

16. As a result of recent security improvements and political advances in Iraq, as well as its relations with its neighbours, the Government of Iraq officially announced that it did not intend to continue with the multilateral regional dialogue mechanism on Iraq, but would rather develop its regional relations on a bilateral basis. Consequently, UNAMI continued to engage with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Office of the Prime Minister to discuss ways of advancing the

regional integration of Iraq, including by integrating regional engagement into the new priorities of the International Compact for Iraq.

17. UNAMI also provided ongoing support to initiatives aimed at advancing bilateral cooperation with the neighbours of Iraq. Its proposal to advance a joint mine clearance project between Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran led to the setting up of a demining and drug coordination committee on the Iraqi side, which has held several meetings since February, as well as the creation of a bilateral demining committee between the two countries. The Mission also continued to provide assistance to the High-level Coordinator for the repatriation or return of all Kuwaiti and third-country nationals or their remains and the return of all Kuwaiti property by developing, with the Ministry of Human Rights of Iraq, a capacity-building project on grave exhumations. Support has also been provided to the Iraq-Kuwait boundary maintenance project, established in accordance with Security Council resolution 833 (1993) and led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the Secretariat, by following up with Iraqi interlocutors on preparations for the next boundary maintenance campaign, scheduled to commence in September. The United Nations is also involved in discussions with Iraqi interlocutors and other stakeholders on the implementation of paragraph 5 of Security Council resolution 1859 (2008), as part of a Secretariat-wide effort to review all resolutions pertaining to Iraq adopted since 1990.

18. During the reporting period, UNAMI remained actively engaged with regional players, with my Special Representative paying official visits to the Syrian Arab Republic, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and my Deputy Special Representative to Turkey, to discuss United Nations activities in Iraq and ways of promoting greater regional cooperation and increased engagement by the country's neighbours.

C. Constitutional support activities

19. As part of an ongoing effort to facilitate dialogue on unresolved constitutional issues, the UNAMI Office of Constitutional Support held a round-table discussion with Iraqi policymakers on 7 and 8 April to consider hydrocarbon management in the context of a federal system. A similar round table was organized in Erbil, with a broader pool of participants. Discussions focused on the evolution of federalism in Iraq, central versus regional competencies on oil contracting, an effective national regime on revenue-sharing, and the unblocking of the hydrocarbon legislation in order to stimulate much-needed foreign investment. In order to build further momentum on these outstanding issues and to support both the national political reconciliation and economic development processes, it was agreed that an expanded conference on federalism and hydrocarbon management would be held in mid-June, hosted by the Council of Representatives with assistance from UNAMI and the United Nations Office for Project Services.

D. Electoral assistance activities

20. On 26 March the Independent High Electoral Commission announced the final certified results for the 31 January governorate council elections. The announcement completed the process of the final adjudication of electoral appeals by the Electoral Judicial Panel, an independent judicial body appointed by the Iraqi Court of

Cassation, and paved the way for the inauguration of new governorate councils and elections for new governors and their deputies.

21. Despite widespread public outreach efforts to ensure that voters knew where to go to vote, 1,428 individual complaints were filed with the Independent High Electoral Commission concerning the voter list (77 per cent of the total 1,856 election-day complaints). Notably, no complaints were submitted by political parties regarding any pervasive errors in the final voter list. The announcement of the preliminary results just five days after polling saw few significant challenges to the credibility of the process, with the notable exception of the complaints raised by the Anbar Awakening Council, which led to the Commission sending an investigatory team to the governorate; the team found the complaint to be unsubstantiated. Additional complaints in Diyala and Ninawa regarding ballot-stuffing allegations led the Commission to annul the results from a number of polling stations. Three candidates were replaced as a result of the Commission's investigation. Ultimately, the Electoral Judicial Panel ruled in favour of the Electoral Commission on each of a total of 593 appeals, dismissing all appeals against the final results.

22. UNAMI has, meanwhile, continued its support for the Independent High Electoral Commission in preparation for a series of upcoming electoral activities, starting with the regional presidential and parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan regional government region, now scheduled for 25 July, and culminating with the Council of Representatives elections in all 18 governorates at the end of 2009 or early in 2010. Following the adoption of the legal framework by the current Kurdistan National Assembly, negotiations have been under way to finalize the budgetary needs. The Electoral Commission technically requires a 90-day preparatory period upon receipt of the budget in order to conduct a credible and accepted election. In this regard, it is noted that the Commission continues to face difficulties in obtaining funds in a timely manner from the Iraqi authorities to implement election activities. This issue must be addressed if the Council of Representatives elections and the nationwide voter registration exercise are to take place as planned.

23. In parallel with technical assistance on operational activities, UNAMI has encouraged the undertaking of a number of lessons-learned exercises to further improve the work of the Independent High Electoral Commission and its operational preparedness for future electoral events. Emphasis is placed in particular on the need for improvements to be made to the national voter list and on its accuracy at the district and subdistrict levels. It is hoped that a comprehensive voter registration update exercise can be undertaken beginning 1 August.

E. Humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and development

24. The recent election of new provincial authorities offers an opportunity to strengthen local governance by making provincial councils accountable for improving living standards in their respective jurisdictions. Several media polls and United Nations surveys over the reporting period indicate that the need to improve the security situation, until recently the main priority for Iraqis, has been overtaken by increased demand for social services and employment. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes are being asked to review their priorities to better assist the Government in this regard.

25. The closure of the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq to new contributions, agreed at the 8th meeting of the Donor Committee of the Facility, held on 18 February in Naples, Italy, also marks the start of a significant transition for United Nations assistance in Iraq. Contributions to the Facility will cease as at 30 June 2009, with no new projects approved beyond 31 December 2009 and no new contractual commitments after 31 December 2010. The contribution of the United Nations to the recovery of Iraq through the Facility was acknowledged by an independent report released at Naples, commissioned by the Donor Committee of the Facility. It confirmed that $1.3 billion, channelled through the Facility to the United Nations, had delivered tangible, physical goods which had improved the lives of the beneficiaries, despite an often difficult operating environment. Donors and the Government of Iraq also welcomed the improved coherence in United Nations programming inside Iraq. I warmly thank the Facility's 25 donor nations for their support to the Fund, notably the European Commission, Japan, Spain, Canada and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Particular appreciation is due to the Government of Italy for its able chairmanship of the Facility for the past two years and to the Government of Denmark for taking up this role in 2009.

26. Drawing on the lessons learned from the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq, Iraq will now enter a new phase of bilateral international assistance. I welcome the decision taken at the Naples meeting to explore options to continue the excellent donor, United Nations and governmental coordination fostered by the Facility. This is critical in order to ensure ownership, accountability and transparency of aid, as called for by the Paris Declaration. To assist in this process, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes decided this quarter to embark on a full United Nations Development Assistance Framework for Iraq from 2011 to 2014, an approach formally endorsed by the Government of Iraq in April and which is in line with the National Development Strategy of Iraq. The Framework will be a significant evolution from the current United Nations Assistance Strategy for Iraq and justly recognizes the ongoing transition of Iraq towards a more stable development trajectory.

27. Iraq still faces considerable socio-economic challenges. Its budget deficit in 2009 is projected at 27 per cent, or $15.9 billion (the highest in the past six years). Poverty is also an ongoing issue. The Iraq Household Socio-Economic Survey, released in January 2009 by the World Bank and the Government of Iraq, confirms that 13 per cent of all Iraqis have a monthly per capita income of less than $51; in rural areas, the rate is 26 per cent. It also underlined problems with municipal services in many areas. For example, 71 per cent of Iraqis have no municipal garbage collection, and only 12 per cent of household water connections are deemed reliable. An analysis of the country's labour force in January showed that 450,000 young people were likely to enter the workforce in 2009, with limited employment opportunities. Those findings suggest that there is a need to provide increased assistance to the provincial councils in setting development targets, planning sectoral strategies and improving budget execution.

28. Meanwhile, despite a recent spike in violence, Iraq continues to see displaced families returning at a steady pace and looking to reintegrate into former communities or seek areas where they feel more secure. By the end of the reporting period, the number of families that had returned since early 2008 had reached nearly 50,000. The vast majority of returns are internally displaced persons, with

approximately 70 per cent having returned within the same governorate, and only 11 per cent having come from abroad. Their decision on whether to return and reintegrate in Iraq appears to have been influenced largely by the security situation and the availability of jobs and services, as well as assurances of legal protections and property rights. Reports indicate that at least 39 per cent of internally displaced persons do not currently wish to return to their place of origin, and humanitarian surveys indicate that, in some instances, they may not be worse off than other Iraqi poor. Surveys carried out by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the Syrian Arab Republic and in Jordan indicate that up to 80 per cent of those interviewed have no intention of returning to Iraq. Those findings emphasize the need for a comprehensive plan for local job creation, in addition to direct assistance to returnees, internally displaced persons and ex-combatants. The United Nations, primarily through UNHCR and other partners, continued to support the efforts of Iraq in protecting, monitoring and assisting returns over the reporting period.

29. The United Nations aims to tackle those complex issues through a comprehensive approach, with large-scale programmes funded through the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq and geared towards the International Compact for Iraq, both to develop the policy environment for private- and State-sector reforms and to promote community-level service delivery and employment. During the past quarter, through the private sector development programme (valued at $30 million), the United Nations, in partnership with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, supported the efforts of Iraq to reform State-owned enterprises. Development of the public sector reform and decentralization of essential services programme (valued at $60 million) is also now fully under way, with the United Nations supporting the Office of the Prime Minister and Government ministries to modernize the country's civil service and administrative structures.

30. International coordination is essential to the success of such initiatives, particularly as the International Compact for Iraq ends its second year of implementation. In 2009, Prime Minister al-Maliki has stressed the need to update the Compact to reflect the country's new realities. The meeting of the Executive Committee of the Compact in April highlighted the importance of the Compact as a tool to identify development priorities that should have international support. However, such areas must be clearly defined and aligned with the country's socio-economic priorities. In that regard, my Special Adviser on the International Compact for Iraq, Ibrahim Gambari, initiated a review to refocus the Compact and visited Baghdad from 24 to 27 May, where he held extensive consultations with the leadership of Iraq, including Prime Minister al-Maliki, Vice-President Abdul Mahdi and Vice-President al-Hashemi. During his stay, he also co-chaired the meeting of the Baghdad Coordination Group with the Deputy Prime Minister, Barham Saleh, on 26 May to present the achievements of the Compact to date and to discuss a future course. Further to his engagement with the Government of Iraq and the donor community, there was an agreement at the Coordination Group to refocus the Compact along specific pillars. The Government of Iraq should advance domestic reforms on the Compact agenda, while the Compact framework would deliver capacity-building and enable economic diplomacy with a view to encouraging foreign investment, trade and economic integration. A preparatory working group

was established to develop a detailed plan to be presented at the forthcoming review conference, scheduled for later in 2009.

31. The country's 2009 population and housing census, scheduled to be held sometime this year, represents the country's first opportunity since 1997 to establish baselines on population demographics in relation to national and global development goals. Initial discussions have begun and, in support of the Government, the United Nations Population Fund hosted a conference on census planning and quality assurance on 23 January in conjunction with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and in partnership with the Iraq Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology (with its counterpart in the Iraqi Kurdistan region).

32. Emergency relief operations by the United Nations and its partners also continued to address disease outbreaks, food insecurity and chronic deprivation. The first quarter of 2009 saw the continuation of a measles outbreak that began in 2008, with 13,679 cases reported across the country, resulting in the deaths of at least 35 children and placing many more at risk. In response, the World Health Organization (WHO) received more than $1 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund to mobilize an emergency immunization campaign, in conjunction with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to contain the outbreak in five affected governorates. UNICEF also continued to provide emergency assistance to 68 of the country's most vulnerable subdistricts, which are home to 1.6 million people, addressing, inter alia, the issues of improved access to water, sanitation, health care, education and psychosocial support. Meanwhile, the World Food Programme (WFP) provided food assistance to about 630,000 internally displaced persons countrywide.

33. Funding for humanitarian operations such as the ones mentioned above remains a challenge. I thank those donors that have contributed to the 2009 consolidated appeal process for Iraq and the region, which is requesting approximately $355 million for humanitarian assistance to Iraqi refugees living abroad and $192 million for the most vulnerable inside the country. Overall, the 2009 Iraq Consolidated Appeal is currently funded at about 43 per cent, but additional support will be required to address the remaining humanitarian gaps. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat renewed the charter of the Expanded Humanitarian Response Fund, which was recently replenished with $15 million from the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq, in order to better support the work of Iraqi relief organizations. The Office has trained more than 40 Iraqi organizations to better access funds from the Fund.

34. Persistent environmental hazards are also resulting in humanitarian and development challenges. Iraq is facing another year of drought after low winter rainfall in many areas, which threatens its environment and agriculture. Dwindling natural water sources are compounding the problem. The Deputy Minister of Water Resources noted this quarter that only 32 per cent of the country's water is locally sourced, leaving Iraq greatly dependent on its neighbours. The flow of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Iraq is diminishing, with the reduction in water quantity also affecting water quality. Agriculture and power production are also affected, with projects to irrigate large tracts of farmland and build additional power stations under threat because of water shortages. The Ministry of Agriculture reported in March that Iraq is using only 50 per cent of its arable land owing to lack of irrigation and

poor soil quality. I encourage Iraq and its neighbours to urgently pursue international dialogue to determine solutions for the country's shared waterways.

35. During the period, the United Nations country team launched two new major joint programmes with the Government of Iraq. The Government of Iraq/United Nations Marshlands Initiative brings together the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNICEF, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNFPA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with the aim of offering a strategic, capacity-development-oriented programme to regenerate this unique environment, improve social services and generate economic development. The initiative includes a commitment by the Minister for the Marshlands and includes an allocation of $5 million from Ministry resources in co-financing. WFP, WHO, UNICEF and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) also launched the Renewed Efforts against Child Hunger initiative in Iraq, aimed at ending child hunger and malnutrition and at developing a national system for monitoring the impact of rising food prices.

36. The second report of Iraq on the implementation of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction was prepared with the support of UNDP and UNICEF. Since the previous report, UNDP, UNICEF and international non-governmental organizations have assisted Iraq in clearing 20 square kilometres of land and in providing more than 276,600 people with mine-awareness training. Civilian demining in Iraq was halted across the country during the reporting period and placed under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence. Given the major humanitarian and economic implications of mines and unexploded ordnance in Iraq, the United Nations has requested that civilian demining be resumed urgently.

37. UNDP also completed the Iraqi Legal Database and selected the Erbil investigating court to be established as a model court under a rule-of-law programme. Together with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNDP conducted a needs assessment on institutional compliance and the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

38. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme assisted the Government in the development of a comprehensive national housing policy to improve housing conditions and tackle the chronic housing shortage. WHO also completed a training programme for medical teams across Iraq to strengthen the delivery of blood-transfusion services. WHO and UNICEF met with the Health Ministry of Iraq to begin updating the country's maternal and child health strategy. UNICEF completed the rehabilitation of 14 schools and distributed educational supplies to almost 20,000 primary-school pupils. The rehabilitation by UNDP of five turbine units at the Mosul and Taji Gas power stations increased power supply to the national grid by an average of nearly 80 megawatts.

39. In line with the United Nations commitment to further gender equality and gender parity, the Organization initiated a gender strategy with the Government of Iraq focusing on the status of Iraqi women in society (constitutional guarantees, employment participation and protection). The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) hosted a conference in Istanbul, with the participation of the Government of Iraq, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies, to help the Government meet its obligations under Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. UNICEF, as part of a systematic approach to

the monitoring and reporting of grave child rights violations, trained more than 400 Iraqis on the prevention of violence against children and young people, particularly girls. The United Nations appreciates the engagement of the Government and civil society on this critical issue for the future of Iraq.

F. Human rights activities

40. On 29 April UNAMI issued its fourteenth report on the human rights situation in the country, covering the period from July to December 2008. The report, produced in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), notes that, although the period covered was characterized by further improvements in the area of security, the overall human rights situation in Iraq remains a matter of concern. The report describes a range of human rights abuses and reiterates that security will be sustainable only if additional steps are taken to strengthen the rule of law and end impunity. The report also acknowledges the important institutional and legal developments during the reporting period. In addition, the report shows that gender-based violence remains one of the key unaddressed problems throughout Iraq.

41. UNAMI remains concerned about the continuing deficiencies in the administration of justice and the rule-of-law sector. The application of anti-terrorism legislation raised additional concerns following the Government's announcement that it intends to resume executions and hang 128 inmates in the second quarter of 2009. UNAMI is also particularly concerned about the current practice of relying heavily on confessions in criminal trial proceedings and harsh interrogation procedures that may amount, in some cases, to torture. In the light of those concerns, UNAMI continued to engage the Iraqi authorities in discussions regarding the country's obligations under international law and urged the Government to immediately establish a moratorium on the execution of all death sentences in Iraq.

42. There are currently no reliable statistics on the prison population in Iraqi detention facilities, owing largely to the lack of accurate and transparent reporting on the implementation of the amnesty law by the authorities of Iraq. UNAMI received credible information that some detainees had been rearrested by Iraqi authorities immediately upon their release from detention facilities controlled by the multinational force in Iraq. Meanwhile, the number of detainees in the custody of the force has decreased from more than 15,000 in December 2008 to 12,500 in April 2009.

43. In order to address the issue of overcrowding and improve the poor incarceration conditions in many detention facilities, the Government of Iraq announced a plan to modernize its detention and prison facilities by either building them anew or, where possible, renovating existing ones. While the UNAMI Human Rights Office welcomes the Government's decision, it remains concerned that, unless the effort is complemented by criminal law reforms, a revision of anti-terrorism measures and improved practices concerning the treatment of detainees and trial proceedings, it will fail to ensure the necessary compliance with international human rights standards and fair trial guarantees.

44. Violence against women remained one of the key unaddressed problems throughout Iraq. Honour-related killings and other forms of violence against women continued to be reported as accidents, attempts at suicide or suicide. UNAMI

continued to engage members of the Government of Iraq and national civil society organizations in the process of raising awareness of women's rights and provided support to various initiatives by the national authorities and non-governmental organizations aimed at eradicating honour-related and other forms of violence against women. On 19 and 20 March, the UNAMI Human Rights Office sponsored an international conference attended by Members of Parliament, representatives of line Ministries, including members of the Kurdistan regional government, and international experts. The conference ended with the adoption of recommendations concerning legislative and other measures aimed at instituting better protection mechanisms for women in times of violence and economic hardship.

45. The UNAMI Human Rights Office continued to provide support to Iraqi institutions with the aim of improving their capacity to protect and promote human rights. Fifteen trainers from the Ministry of Interior and Defence received extensive training on human rights principles in international and domestic law. The training took place from February to April in Erbil.

46. The vacuum left by the resignation of the Speaker of the Council of Representatives in December 2008 caused a number of projects to be delayed, including the establishment of the Independent High Commission for Human Rights. The Human Rights Committee of the Council of Representatives requested the Speaker to appoint a committee in charge of the commissioners' recruitment process. As the 2009-2010 Iraqi budget, which was approved in March, did not provide funding for the High Commission, UNAMI urges the Council of Representatives and the Government of Iraq to include budgetary provisions for funding the Commission in the coming midterm budget review in June 2009.

47. In March, the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq approved a UNAMI Human Rights Office project on the training and equipping of a team of experts from the Ministry of Human Rights to lead Government exhumations of mass graves across Iraq. The project, which will complement other transitional justice and reconciliation projects by the Human Rights Office, is expected to give priority to graves with the remains of missing Kuwaiti prisoners of war.

G. Operational, logistic and security issues

48. In line with the Bilateral security agreement, the ongoing transition of security responsibilities from the United States military to the Iraqi Security Forces continues. The United States military has begun to withdraw from a number of bases and joint security stations across the country, and the Iraqi Security Forces are increasingly taking over more domestic security responsibilities. In Baghdad, security restrictions appear to be easing, with many temporary concrete walls being removed from urban areas as part of the broader normalization process. Officials of the Government of Iraq indicate that the capability of the Iraqi Security Forces is sufficient to take over from the departing multinational force. However, armed opposition groups, Al-Qaida and other extremist elements continue to demonstrate the intent and capability to conduct major attacks against Government officials, security forces and the local population. Although there has been a demonstrable reduction in insurgent activity across the country in the past 12 months, there are still armed groups determined to incite sectarian violence and undermine public confidence in the Government's capability to provide effective security.

49. Overall, Kurdistan regional government areas remained stable, thereby allowing a more expansive programme of outreach activities by UNAMI and the United Nations country team. However, there is still a threat of militant elements infiltrating from other regions. In the disputed city of Kirkuk and the surrounding areas, there have been persistent low-level attacks against Iraqi and United States military forces by local armed groups. Particular attention has been paid to the potential increase in intercommunal friction, as well as to the risk of escalating tensions between the Iraqi Security Forces and Kurdish Peshmerga forces stationed in the disputed areas of Kirkuk Governorate and northern Diyala. Meanwhile, Iraqi and United States forces launched a new series of joint offensives aimed at Al-Qaida and other militants across Ninawa province. To date, military operations have generally not been as effective in reducing insurgent influence in this area as they have in other provinces. Mosul recorded a weekly average of six to seven mass casualty events per month, including car bombs and suicide-vest attacks, as well as targeted killings of tribal and political leaders.

50. Insurgent activity in Anbar province is still concentrated along the Ramadi-Fallujah corridor, with isolated incidents reported in the vicinity of Al-Qaim (border area) and Hit. Ramadi itself remains reasonably stable, but vehicle and suicide bombers have been consistently targeting Iraqi Security Forces and Awakening Council leaders in and around Fallujah. In Baqubah, insurgents still pose a significant challenge to security forces both in the city and in surrounding rural areas, with even the Provincial Council complex remaining vulnerable, as was demonstrated when a suicide bomber circumvented all security measures to attack a visiting United States delegation.

51. Incident levels remained low across southern Iraq, with the exception of two suicide attacks on pilgrims travelling to Karbala in February, and two car bomb attacks in the northern area of Al-Hillah, one of which targeted and killed members of the Sons of Iraq as they queued to receive their salaries from a Ministry of the Interior office. Continuing security operations in Basra and other major population centres have netted a large number of suspected militants and uncovered significant weapons caches across the region. Interdiction operations against weapons smugglers in Maysan Province in particular have been successful in eliminating thousands of rockets, mortars and improvised bombs. In spite of those successes, both the Iraqi Security Forces and the multinational force continue to face regular attacks by weapons from such caches.

52. The United Nations in Iraq continues to face immense challenges in safeguarding its personnel and assets and in conducting operations owing to the complex and evolving dynamics of the security environment. In that regard, and taking into consideration the required balance between security and programming, UNAMI continued with the development and realignment of its operational capacity to support existing activities and put into place the necessary protective measures to facilitate the envisaged expansion of the Mission, in particular in support of the special agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations. To this end, the UNAMI Security Section engaged not only with the Departments of Safety and Security, Political Affairs and Field Support of the Secretariat, but also actively engaged with the United Nations country team both at Headquarters and at the local level to ensure that the future security posture reflects and meets the actual needs of those agencies.

53. The military advisers provided by Member States to assist the Mission both with its expansion of activities across the governorates and with its liaison with Iraqi and the multinational force remain essential. With the implementation of the bilateral security agreement and the increasing engagement of the Mission with the Iraqi Security Forces, the support provided by the military advisers in conducting joint capability assessments with counterparts, determining the future operational support available and coordinating mechanisms with Iraqi forces as the transition progresses, has significantly helped the UNAMI Security Section in shaping the future concept of operations. On behalf of the Mission, I thank all Member States for their contributions in this regard.

IV. Observations

54. During the reporting period, there were encouraging signs of progress in Iraq. Following the successful and largely peaceful conduct of provincial elections earlier in the year, we witnessed local democratic processes at work with the formation of political alliances to allow the selection of governors and their deputies in each of the 14 governorates that held elections. The hope is that this will serve to promote greater accountability in local governance institutions. In addition, after a long stalemate in the Council of Representatives, an agreement was reached on the selection of a new Speaker of Parliament and on a rigorous plan of work aimed at making progress on critical outstanding legislation essential for the country's recovery. The Iraqi Security Forces also continued to demonstrate their ability to assume greater security responsibilities. Those developments underscore a general positive trend in the country on both the political and security fronts.

55. Nevertheless, many important challenges remain, and further progress is needed in the coming months to ensure that the gains made so far can be sustained. As I have said in my previous reports, national reconciliation remains the main priority in Iraq. In particular, the resolution of key issues, including federalism, the sharing of natural resources and disputed internal boundaries, could serve as a means to achieving lasting peace. Further progress on these complex issues will be possible only if Iraqi leaders come together in a spirit of national unity and adopt much-needed constitutional and legislative measures in the political, electoral, economic and social fields. The delivery of essential services will also be critical to improving the lives of the Iraqi people. In accordance with its mandate, the United Nations continues to support and facilitate the ongoing efforts of Iraq in all those areas.

56. While the Iraqi Security Forces continue to demonstrate their capability to assume an increasing level of responsibility, the continuing attacks against civilians serve as a stark reminder of the ongoing challenges in the security field. I urge all Iraqis not to succumb to the politics of mistrust, intimidation, fear or revenge, but rather to work together to build on the positive achievements made so far.

57. Important electoral processes in Iraq are ongoing, and the Independent High Electoral Commission is preparing for electoral events in 2009 and early 2010. With UNAMI support, the Electoral Commission will be implementing elections in the Kurdistan regional government region in July and carrying out a nationwide voter registration update exercise in August and new Council of Representatives elections in late 2009 or early 2010. The governorate council elections in January were deemed a success by many, and it is hoped that the Independent High Electoral

Commission will build on this solid foundation and deliver further credible electoral events. UNAMI remains committed to the continued provision of technical assistance under its mandate. Its goal is to assist the election commission to be election-ready should any other events be called, such as elections in Kirkuk, possible referendums, and/or district and subdistrict elections.

58. I note with concern rising tensions in several areas, particularly in Ninawa, Kirkuk and Diyala. While I welcome the recent effort to organize joint patrols between the Iraqi Security Forces and the Peshmerga in some disputed areas, much more needs to be done to stabilize the situation. I urge national and local leaders to endeavour to ease tensions and work towards resolving the underlying causes. In this regard, I support the efforts of my Special Representative and UNAMI to facilitate a political dialogue and assist the parties in finding mutually acceptable solutions. In particular, the Mission's report on the disputed internal boundaries of Iraq could serve as a useful starting point for constructive dialogue. I urge Iraqi leaders to use this opportunity to engage in a process aimed at resolving these important issues. UNAMI will continue to work with all stakeholders on possible next steps.

59. At the same time, in support of strengthening the rule of law and respect for human rights through transparent and independent institutions, UNAMI intends to promote the Independent High Commission for Human Rights. I would also encourage the Government of Iraq to continue its efforts in the area of judicial reform, especially with respect to the move from a confession-based to an evidence-based justice system. The United Nations stands ready to assist in this important endeavour. However, I regret the recent decision by the Government of Iraq to resume the use of the death penalty in Iraq, and I would urge the Government to reconsider a moratorium.

60. The recovery of Iraq is entering a different phase, with the Government leading the effort and a shift away from a multi-donor trust fund to an emphasis on bilateral donor relations. This new reality calls for a change in the balance and the nature of international support for Iraq, and, from the United Nations perspective, we envisage a much greater focus on sustainable social and economic development. A healthy economy, jobs, services and a functioning government system are the benefits of good democratic governance. To respond to this demand, the special agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations will need to expand their outreach in Iraq. As security improves, it is hoped that the Government of Iraq and the United Nations country team will have a more intensive and policy-based interaction. At the national level, this includes the provision of United Nations technical expertise and international best practices; at the provincial level, it includes United Nations assistance to improve social services and promote job creation. Looking forward, the production of a comprehensive United Nations Development Assistance Framework will help normalize the United Nations country team's relations with Iraq. Such a realignment and expansion of our operations will be a United Nations priority for 2009.

61. The coordination of international assistance to Iraq is an equally important priority, as the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq closes and the International Compact for Iraq approaches its third year of implementation. A strategic review of the country's future coordination mechanisms is both necessary and timely so as to update international strategies within the sovereign context of

Iraq. A dialogue between the Government and donors on how the Compact should be adapted is essential. As co-chair of the Compact, I would encourage an approach that is more streamlined and targeted to the country's socio-economic priorities. In this regard, I welcome the close cooperation between the Government of Iraq and my Special Adviser on the International Compact, Ibrahim Gambari.

62. Resources should also be spent in areas that will make a lasting difference to social and economic revival. For example, refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees are a critical priority, and the United Nations will continue to support Iraq to ensure their integration, resettlement and return. However, all the existing evidence suggests that such efforts will not be effective in isolation from much broader initiatives to rebuild livelihoods and services in very poor and conflict-affected communities. I strongly urge Iraq, neighbouring host countries and the international community to work together to address these complex issues.

63. I firmly believe that regional and international cooperation remain essential for the stability and recovery of Iraq and recognise that such initiatives need to be further consolidated. I have been encouraged by the recent series of high-level State visits between Iraq and many of its neighbours. Under its mandate, UNAMI will continue to provide technical expertise and assistance to the Government of Iraq as it engages its neighbours through regional mechanisms and bilateral initiatives on issues of mutual concern. In addition, in its resolution 1859 (2008), the Security Council called for a review of all resolutions pertaining specifically to Iraq, beginning with the adoption of resolution 661 (1990), and requested the Secretary-General to report, after consultations with Iraq, on facts relevant for consideration by the Council of actions necessary for Iraq to achieve international standing equal to that which it held prior to the adoption of such resolutions. I will soon present a report to the Security Council in accordance with resolution 1859 (2008).

64. As the security situation improves, the United Nations will continue to strive to expand its presence and activities in Iraq consistent with the needs of Iraq, as well as its own operational capabilities. However, Iraq remains a challenging operating environment, and the safety and security of United Nations personnel is one of my top priorities. For that reason, the United Nations will continue to depend on Member States for security, logistical, operational and financial support in the foreseeable future. This includes timely investments to improve the Organization's own operational capabilities. I thank the Government of Iraq and the multinational force for their ongoing support of the United Nations presence in Iraq.

65. I would like to express my deep gratitude to all United Nations staff working in Iraq for their tireless efforts. It is a testament to the Organization's commitment to assisting the people of Iraq in rebuilding their nation at this critical juncture in history. I would like to express my appreciation to the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, David Shearer, who recently left the Mission. Thanks to his efforts, United Nations activities in the humanitarian, reconstruction and development fields are better aligned with the country's own priorities. I also commend the active leadership of my Special Representative for Iraq, Staffan de Mistura, who will leave the Mission shortly. Under challenging conditions, his personal efforts to promote political dialogue, especially with respect to disputed internal boundaries and ensuring the success of the recent provincial elections, deserve particular recognition.